

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o XII.]

Saturday, April 23. 1785.

Hippocrates — *in his chapter of Hats.* MOCK DOCTOR.

IT has often been remarked, that men are apt to display more of their real character in circumstances apparently slight and unimportant, than in the greater and more momentous actions of life. Our behaviour, or even the remark we may drop upon some seemingly trifling occurrence, will often strongly denote the real complexion of our mind; and it is upon this account that we admire so much the happy talent of those writers who, by a well chosen circumstance, contrive at once to paint and make us acquainted with the character of the persons whom they wish to describe.

The great passions which actuate men in the pursuits of life, present little diversity of features to afford any just discrimination of character. Besides, in conducting the pursuits to which these passions incite, men are taught to be upon their guard: they are restrained by the customs and opinions of the world, and, under a kind of disguise, are constantly acting an artificial part. But in the more trifling circumstances of manner and behaviour, and in the more ordinary occurrences of life, which tend to no particular object, and in which therefore men are less upon their guard, any disguise is forgot to be assumed, and we give way to the natural cast of our mind and disposition. It is there we are apt to betray those peculiar features of character, and those often nice shades of distinction, that difference and discriminate us from one another.

I have often amused myself with thinking, that, even in what may be deemed very slight circumstances of outward deportment and manner, I could distinctly trace something of the peculiar character of the man. There are particulars in our ordinary demeanor and appearance which are more connected with our turn of mind than we are apt to suspect, and more especially when they are such as from constant and daily repetition necessarily become familiar to us. I remember that a friend of mine, who was a great observer of those smaller traits which escaped others, assured me, that in the circle of his acquaintance he could, in the pace and manner of walking of each, mark out something which indicated its arising from

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the particular temper and disposition of the man. Nay, even where the manner of walking was the result, not of nature, but of affectation, he used to say, he could thence also discover the character; and that, independent of the meanness of affectation in so frivolous a circumstance, we might be certain that the affected pace was assumed to give the appearance of some quality which the person wished to possess, and knew himself to want. "La gravité," says Rochefoucault, "est un mystère du corps, inventé pour cacher les défauts de l'esprit." In confirmation of this, I remember that I once knew a Noble Lord who affected on all occasions a very slow and solemn pace, walking even across the room, or from one room to another, with all the leisurely solemnity of an usher at a funeral; but no one had sat at table with his Lordship for a single hour, without being sufficiently convinced, from his coarse jokes and horse-laugh, that real dignity was no feature of his mind, and that he wished to supply the want, by what he fancied a very dignified gait, and manner of walking.

I happened, not long since, to be at an election-dinner, where, as is usually the case, the company was very numerous, very noisy, and very dull. In taking our places at table, I chanced, unfortunately, to be separated from some friends whom I had wished to sit by; and finding none near me from whose conversation I could derive much entertainment, I was left to amuse myself with my own reflections on the crowd, and noise, and confusion, which surrounded me. I happened at last to cast my eyes upon the opposite side of the room, where I perceived that every one seated in that row had hung up his hat on the wall behind him. Upon surveying these hats, and remarking that each had something particular which, to an attentive observer, differed it from its neighbour, I began next to indulge my imagination, in fitting the hat to the head of its owner, and in trying if the distinguishing figure of each hat did not correspond with something in the manner and character of the person to whom it appertained.

From the military hat and the navy hat, I could learn nothing; these, like their owners, being too much under regulation and discipline, to admit of any diversity. It was amongst the other hats only that I could expect a field for observation. The first which attracted my attention was a very new and glossy hat, made up and cocked in the very extremity of the fashion. Had it been graced with a cockade, I should have proceeded to the next; but wanting that, I looked below to find out the owner, and soon discovered, that it could belong to none but a young barrister, who is less studious of his brief than of being thought a man of fashion, above the pedestrian

dantry of his profession, and I think is very likely to attain his wish. The next hat was just the reverse of the former. It was of a form and cock that has been out of date these ten years, and yet withal it seemed new. Close below it, I discerned the careful owner, who, for fear of accidents, had cautiously placed himself near. He is rich and penurious; and by the most wretched saving, has amassed a fortune. Contiguous to these hung a hat which appeared to have suffered more by negligence than by age. It seemed to have been intended to be moderately fashionable; but from the inattention of its owner, had its air and form a good deal impaired. It was the property of a learned philosopher who sat not far distant, and who is too much absorbed in abstract speculation, to give attention to circumstances of dress. Not far distant hung a hat seemingly fresh and new, excepting in its front angle, where the cock was so squeezed, compressed, and crumpled, as sufficiently to denote its very familiar acquaintance with the hand of its owner. I had no difficulty in appropriating it. Its master is the most complaisant man in town, knows every body, is constantly in the street, and in places of public resort, and bows with the most respectful attention to every one he meets. Near this last was a hat which for some time puzzled me what to make of it. It was neither new nor old; it was neither much in nor much out of the fashion; and seemed to be a strange mixture between the old fashion and the new, with a kind of studied endeavour to be most of the latter. After some time, I believe I hit upon its owner. He is a gentleman who wishes to be of the fashion as far as his affection to his money, which is the stronger principle with him, will permit; and his whole life is a warfare between his vanity and his avarice.

On the next peg was stuck a round riding-hat, with a broad brim flapp'd down, and a double hat-band, which, however, instead of surrounding it at the proper place, had started, like the hoops of a staved cask, and was seen loose upon its top; it was covered partly with powder, and partly with dirt, half brushed, and had several little cuts on the crown. I easily discovered the owner, though his place was a good way off; a tall stout-looking young man, who sat near the bottom of the table, with his arm thrown negligently over the back of his own chair, and his leg, on which was a rumpled boot, resting on the cross-bar of the chair next him; from which attitude he was only moved by our toast-master's frequent calls for a bumper, which command he very religiously obeyed. I was too distant to profit by his conversation, of which however he seemed very sparing, being of that order of *Bucks* who have been taught to drink long before they have learned to speak.

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After this there was a blank, the peg immediately adjoining being occupied by no hat whatever. On looking below I discovered the person whose hat should have filled it. He was dressed in a shining suit, his waistcoat splendidly embroidered, at the breast of which appeared a quantity of rich lac'd ruffle. He sat erect in his chair, and seemed moved by no intrusive idea, except when sometimes he shrunk with fear, if perchance a bottle tripp'd on the joinings of the table, or a glass was spilled by an awkward neighbour. His hat was only a bit of black silk, of which I discovered the corner sticking out of his pocket, his foretop being too nicely dressed to admit of any covering. But I believe I suffered nothing from the want of any distinguishing mark of his character or disposition. The man is in reality nothing; 'tis his coat only that makes a figure in the world. As for emotions, passions, virtue, or knowledge, he puts them, like his hat, into his pocket.

After this survey, at which, perhaps, some of my readers will smile, I amused myself with considering how in this slight particular of dress we may be apt to discover our character, and even upon the bit of beaver with which we cover our heads, to stamp somewhat of the image of our minds. I was pleased with thinking, that however men may wrap themselves up in artificial disguise in the greater actions of life; yet even amidst all their concealments, there are circumstances to be found where nature will discover itself, and by which an attentive and diligent observer may be able to read the real character of the man.

I have often thought of discovering amongst the ladies some circumstance which might lead me to distinguish their characters in the same way that the hat discriminates those of the gentlemen. But I found them so little free agents in this matter, so much the uniform creation of milliners and hair-dressers, that it was impossible to trace any characteristical mark about them. All my efforts, therefore, have hitherto been baffled; and I was about to have abandoned the thing as impossible, till a Lady who has lived much in the world, to whom I mentioned my difficulty, very lately assured me, that she can furnish me with a pretty remarkable particular which will perfectly answer the purpose, and that she will impart to me a set of observations which she herself has made, to confirm the certainty of the test. When she is pleased to favour me with these, they shall be communicated to my readers.

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